4: Guha E-5 (1948-1949)1953 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

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BULLETIN

OF THE

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Vol. I., No. I

JANUARY-1952

[Title Page]

EDITED BY:

The Director, Department of Anthropology, Government of India, Calcutta.

PUBLISHED BY THE MANAGER OF PUBLICATIONS, DELHI.
PRINTED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA PRESS, CALCUTTA, INDIA.
1952.

Price.....(India).....(Foreign) per volume.

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Report of a Survey of the Inhabitants of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands during 1948-49

[71]

By

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Director, Department of Anthropology

About the end of the year 1946, Mr H. J. Stooks, Deputy Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs, consulted me with regard to proposals made by Sri A. V. Thakkar of the Bharatiya Adim Jati Sevak Sangh for undertaking work for the amelioration of the conditions of the inhabitants of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands on the same lines as the Sangh has been doing among the Bhils and other tribes of Central India. The problem of the Aborigines of the Andaman Islands, however, is not the same as that of the other primitive tribes of India. These people are some of the most ancient remnants of the human race still surviving in any part of the world, who had been very little affected from contact with other people and subsist principally on fishing and hunting. The need among them is not so much the spread of education and social uplift as the arrest of the decline in population which has been most alarming. Since the establishment of the Penal Settlement at Port Blair in 1858, the condition of the "Friendly Tribes" among these inhabitants have been most distressing. Due in the beginning to armed encounters with the forces of the Government, and also as a result of ravages from diseases like tuberculosis and syphilis contracted from Indian convicts, there has been a continuous decline in the Andamanese population. From an estimated figure of about 10,000 people in 1779 the tribe has been reduced to only 70 in 1931, and at the time of our visit there were probably not more than 37 individuals still living. Whether it will be possible to save the Andamanese from the fate of the Tasmanians whose last surviving representative passed away about 1770 is extremely doubtful.

The hostile branch of the Andamanese tribes known as the Jarawa-Onge-Sentinelese group, fortunately has been spared the fate of their more "friendly" kinsmen, and as a result of implacable hostility and comparative isolation have survived to a much larger extent. In the western forest belts of Middle and South Andamans, the Little Andaman, and the North Sentinel Islands they have resisted all intrusions from outsiders and were known to have lived in these places comparatively unmolested. No accurate census of these tribes however, was ever taken, but from estimates made by people who had some knowledge of the tribes, it does not seem possible that the total strength of these people could be more than a few hundred souls altogether before the last war. What has happened since and how far these people, specially the Jarawas, have suffered from Japanese occupation cannot accurately be determined. It is known that there had been some bombing by the Japanese in the Jarawa tract, but whether any Jarawa was killed is not known. I, therefore, suggested to Mr Stooks that an anthropological survey of the Islands was essential and a probable estimate of the surviving settlements of the population made before the question of any social welfare work can be considered.

122 considered. I promised the full collaboration of this Department for undertaking such a survey. It was at first planned to take a fully equipped scientific party for a period of at least six months with headquarters at Port Blair, members of which could pay short visits to the different Islands where the Andamanese tribes were known to have lived. The Ministry of Home Affairs agreed to the proposal and expressed their willingness to place a trawler at our dispoeal for visiting the outlying islands as no other means of transport existed. Negotiations were taken up for securing the services of Mr Crawley of the B. N. Railway to accompany the party as guide and adviser for he was one of the few who had a direct knowledge of the Jarawa area. With Mr. Duncan of the same Railway, both of whom were landed in the Jarawa territory by British submarines during the last War he spent nearly 6 months in that tract. Although Mr Crawley was very willing to accompany our party it was not found possible in the end to secure his services as the B. N. Railway could not spare him. What is still more unfortunate was that the R. I. N. could not spare any trawler. The prevalence of polio or infantile paralysis in an [164] epidemic form in the Nicobar Islands at the time made it impossible to include them in our itinerary. Lastly, the Chief Commissioner of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands informed us that owing to great demands on residential accommodation at Port Blair it would be difficult for him to find enough living quarters for our party. He suggested that a smaller party might be sent instead, for making exploratory surveys only.

Accordingly, the original plan had to be modified and a party consisting of myself, Mr S. S. Sarkar, who had then just joined the Department, 3 scientific assistants and 3 attendants left for the Islands on board the 'S. S. Maharaja' on February 17, 1948, reaching Port Blair on the 20th. The Chief Commissioner, Mr S. Majid, I.C.S., met us at the quay and arranged for our stay at the Guest House facing the harbour. He was an exceedingly well-informed and kind gentleman and promised to give us all facilities in our work. We 121 discussed the various questions concerning the Andamanese population and he agreed with me that the most pressing need was to collect correct statistics regarding the strength and distribution of the so-called hostile tribes. For very little can be done now to save the Andamanese proper who have paid for their friendliness by being driven to the verge of extinction and it is now a question of time before they would completely disappear. At the present [161] moment the surviving remnants of this group numbering about 37 have been collected and settled in the Neil and Havelock Islands. In consultation with 122 Mr Majid the plan of making the preliminary reconnaissance was fixed. It was agreed that I, and as many of my party as could be accommodated in the Port Blair harbour launch 'Molly', which Mr Majid by arrangements with the harbour authorities found it possible to place at our disposal for about a week, would leave for Little Andaman to survey the eastern coast of the Island in search of the Onge settlements, as far as this was practicable within this short time. Accordingly we left Port Blair on the 23rd February at 7-30 in the morning on board the motor launch 'Molly'; myself, Messrs S. S. Sarkar, S. Banerjee, R. De and Ramkasis forming the members of our party.

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[P.2(A)] Captions will be found on P.2(B)-Analysis

[P.248]

PLATE I

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Fig. 1—Onge hut, north of Dugong Creek, in Little Andaman Island.

Fig. 2—Onge hut, north of Dugong Creek, in Little Andaman Island.

Fig. 3—Entrance to Onge hut north of Dugong Creek in Little Andaman.

Fig. 4—Onges in front of their hut in Little Andaman (South of Dugong Creek). [192]

Fig. 5—Jarawa Shelter at Spike Island in Middle Andaman.

Fig. 6—Onge canoes with single outrigger in Little Andaman waters. [501]

Mr Subramanian of the Forest Department and Mr Majid's young son also accompanied us. We reached Bumila Creek on the north eastern coast of the Little Andaman at about 3 P.M. and having sighted an Andamanese hut we decided to anchor the launch there. The beach was about 2 miles from the place of anchorage. We took out a small boat and rowed to the beach and reached the hut at about 4 P.M. It was found to be abandoned but there were signs of human occupation and within a few yards a water-hole was discovered. A broken canoe, with a single out-rigger was found close to the hut (*see* Plate I, Fig. 1). Burnt coal and smouldering ashes in the centre of the hut showed that it was probably deserted by the Aborigines as soon as they had sighted us. After making a careful inspection of the place we returned to our launch and decided to anchor there for the night. Unfortunately the choppy sea and the strong current coming from the Bumila Creek tossed our small boat throughout the whole night, as a result of which all of us had an uncomfortable time.

We left southwards towards Hut Bay early in the morning and as we moved along the coast we sighted another Onge hut. This did not seem to be deserted as we saw a few people moving about. We decided to stop there and investigate. We took out a boat and moved towards the coast with such presents as we had brought from Port Blair on the advice of the Chief Commissioner. When we got near the coast, we left the boat and walked for about a furlong through coral beds finally reaching the shore. The hut was found to be circular in shape and not too large, and was occupied by 2 adult females, 1 adult male and a young boy. The adult male, *Ukla*, was the father of the young boy and husband of the younger woman. The older woman was his mother-in-law. These people appeared very friendly. We gave them presents we had brought and took photographs and made drawings of their hut. In addition, full anthropometric measurements were taken by me and blood was taken from fingers for typing by Mr Sarkar. Ukla was able to speak a few Hindi words and we gathered that he had been to Port Blair and knew Mr Bonington, formerly of the Forest Department, Andaman Islands. We found in front of the hut, hanging from a large tree the skull and mandible of a Dugong (*see* Plate I, Figs. 3 & 4). We enquired about its significance from Ukla, but unfortunately his knowledge of Hindi was not sufficient to explain it to us. We learned from him, however, that the name of the village was *Laito*. After making friendly gestures, we returned to 'Molly' and proceeded immediately towards Hut Bay. At about noon time while we were having our lunch, we suddenly saw three outrigger canoes (of single outrigger type) coming towards us, each carrying about 4 Onges. We signalled to them and they came to our launch and tied their canoes with it and came on board. The men appeared to be friendly and not afraid of us. Our greatest difficulty, however, was language, as we could not make ourselves understood as none of the crew or any other member including Mr Subramaniam of the Forest Department knew that language. There was one man who seemed to occupy a position of authority among these men, and was painted with red and yellow ochre on the forehead, arms and breast. The

crew of the ship called him 'Raja' and we adopted this name (*see* Plate IV, Figs. 1 & 2). He was the only one among the Onges who was fully armed with knives, bows and arrows. Among the contents of the canoes, we found complete fishing out-fits, bows and arrows, ropes and nautilous shells, for bailing out water. There was also a kind of bamboo float about 1½ ft. long, probably used for turtle fishing. We gave them food, cigarettes and other presents. After they became quite familiar with us and friendly, they were subjected to full anthropometric measurements by me. Their blood was also tapped by Mr Sarkar for typing. The presents given were iron nails, strips of red cloth, tea and tobacco leaves. Among all these objects what they liked most were the tobacco leaves. Cooked rice, dal (cooked lentils) and fish curry served to them from the launch Mess were however not much appreciated. With the few Hindi words that they were able to understand, we told them that we would like to visit their camp next morning and meet other members of the party. After the canoes had left, we anchored at this point for the night and after taking an early breakfast we left for the shore in two batches. We were informed by the crew that the creek near the Onge camp was called the *Dugong Creek*. We had to wade through brakish water and coast fringing with coral beds for about two miles, before we reached the Onge settlement. There was one large circular communal hut characteristic of the Onges and several lean-to's (*see* Plate I, Fig. 2). We noticed three canoes on the beach apparently those with which they came to meet us on the previous day. We saw also several small dogs and the entrails of a pig strewn round. We met all the 12 Onges we saw the day before, along with Ukla and his family. In addition there were a number of women and children. We took out our presents of dried tobacco leaves, iron nails and two large fishes that we had caught on our way from Port Blair. These were distributed to the Onges. There were altogether 17 men, 15 women, 4 boys and 3 girls. The children were between 1½ to 4 years. The entire party of Onges behaved towards us in a friendly manner and subjected to our measurements and tapping of blood from their fingers without any protest. We went inside their hut and inspected the settlement very thoroughly. A large number of photographs were taken. We found that the name of this village was *Tambebui*. As it became rather late, we decided to return to 'Molly' in the Andamanese canoes, rather than walk through the coral beds for 2 miles. The Onges understood our signs and gladly escorted us back to the launch. We found there were several other Onges waiting for us in the launch who came from the neighbouring village *Gabilong*. All of these Onges appear to be under the influence of the man nick-named as 'Raja' (*see* Plate IV, Figs. 1-2).

We could not proceed towards Hut Bay as the launch had to return for duty at Port Blair, where we reached at about mid-night.

After reaching Port Blair, I discussed the matter of transport with the Chief Commissioner, Mr Majid. A thorough coastal survey of Little Andaman would take at least 15 to 20 days. As it was found impossible to get either from the Forest Department or from the Harbour Master any of their launches

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[P.4(A)]

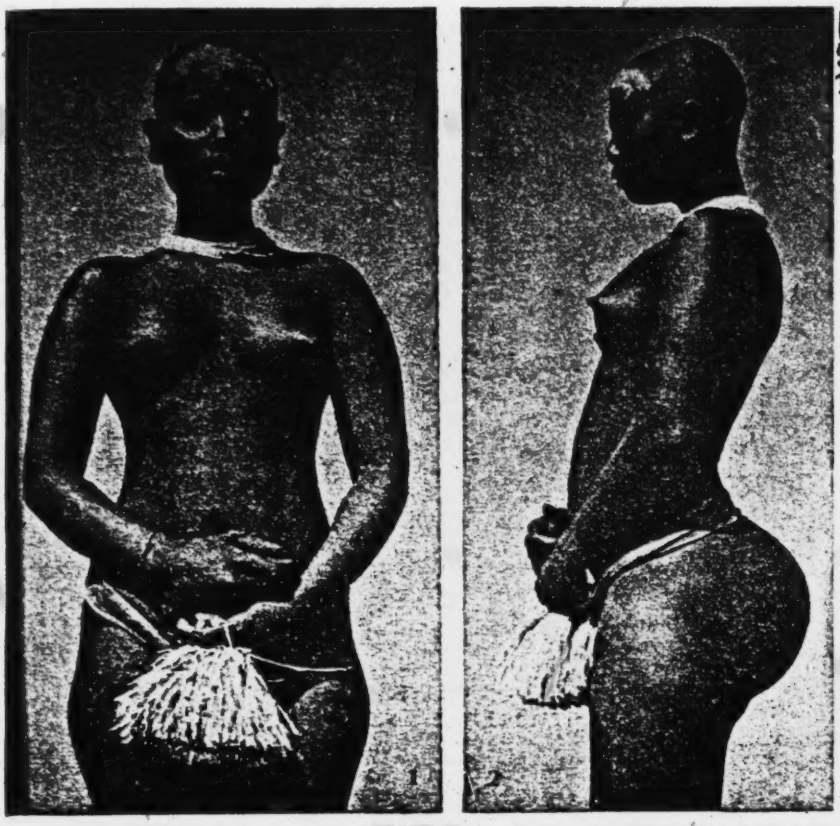

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PLATE II.

Figs. 1 & 2—Onge female of the hut No. 2, Plate 1, in Little Andaman Island (front and profile).

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[P 4(B)]

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PLATE III.

Onge females living in hut No. 2, Plate 1.

4: Guha E-5 (1948-1949)1953 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

[P.4(C)]

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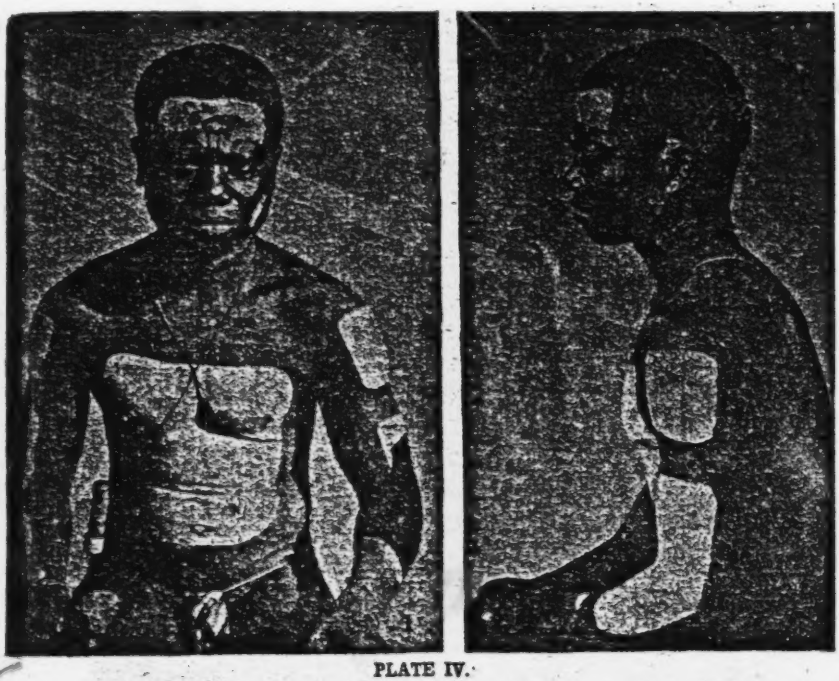

PLATE IV.

Figs. 1 & 2—Onge male (Raja) decorated with paints on board the "Molly" in Little Andaman waters.

4: Guha E-5 (1948-1949)1953 AZ2 Andamans AZ2
Karen AP7

for such a fairly long period, it was decided to give up the idea of continuing our survey of the Little Andaman that year.

At the suggestion of Mr Majid it was finally decided instead to pay a visit to the surviving members of the Friendly Andamanese tribes at Neil and Havelock Islands where they had now been transferred and settled. Unfortunately, as it was March and the closing month of the financial year, I had to return to my headquarters at Banaras and leave Mr Sarkar in charge of the party to carry on further surveys in the North and Middle Andamans as far as this was found possible.

Accordingly Mr Sarkar with his party left Port Blair on 6-3-48 on the Forest Motor Launch "Lindsay" and arrived at Long Island at about 8 A.M. on the following day. Mr Sarkar was met by Mr Joseph, T. S. D. O. who brought "Loka" and his party of four Andamanese. They were studied by him. The party left Long Island on the Forest Launch "Kokhari" at about 7-30 A.M. on the following day. Mr Joseph accompanied the party, who halted at the Guitar Island where some of Loka's associates were hunting turtles with harpoons. After leaving Guitar Island, the launch passed through Homfray Strait. Mr Joseph showed the spot where the Jarawas in 1925 attacked his camp. This is near the place from where the Jarawas usually crossed from the Baratang Island to the Middle Andamans. Proceeding further westwards, Mr Sarkar and his party reached the north-east end of the Spike Island. This is another route of migration of the Jarawas from the South to North Andamans. Usually they come from the South Andaman and cross over to Bluff Island and then reach the Spike Island opposite to it. Loka gave the information that it was about this place that several Jarawas were shot sometime back and their bodies were buried in the Bluff Island. The party went along the coast of Neil Island and anchored off Foul Bay. Human footprints identified by Mr Joseph and Loka as belonging to the Jarawas were found in the sand. Following the footprints the party found the remnants of burnt ashes and cinder in a spot in the jungle. There were also vessels made of leaves for carrying water which were still wet. These were collected as specimens of Jarawa objects for the Department's collections. No traces of Jarawas themselves could however be found who must have moved into the jungles just prior to our party's visit. Our men then crossed over to Bluff Island and searched for the Jarawa skeletons, but none were found. On the 9th of March the "Kokhari" returned to Long Island, where it anchored. Loka brought his party of 21 individuals who were now settled in Neil Island. These people were carefully studied by Mr Sarkar and notes taken regarding their geneology, family structure and physical state, etc. On the 9th the Deputy Chief Commissioner, Mr S. C. Gupta with his wife arrived at Long Island. Mr Sarkar and his party accompanied him to Stewart Sound in his boat "Elsa". Unfortunately the few Andamanese who were living there happened to have gone out in their canoes for fishing and could not be contacted (*see* Plate I, Fig. 5).

They then went with Mr Gupta to the Karen village called *Webi* situated at a short distance from Stewart Sound. There were no Andamanese there,

K 361 [162] A 114 there were no Andamanese there, but 400 people consisting of 133 males and 130 females who migrated from Bassein in 1924. They were Karen Christians who had settled there. After returning to Long Island on the 12th, Mr Sarkar and party left in the motor boat "Return" for a short cruise along the Jarawa country. Besides Mr Joseph, there were Mr Pooviah and a few of his Burman Bush Police armed with rifles and guns. The party passed through the Homfray's Strait and anchored at the north eastern corner of the Spike Island. Loka and his party of three Andamanese accompanied them in their two canoes. They came to the shore in one of the Andamanese canoes and after entering the forest they found A [501] bundles of bamboos piled up at one corner. This was identified as a Jarawa raft. There were also three paddles made out of a palm tree. These specimens were procured for the Department. After proceeding some distance in the jungle, 19 small fire places were counted in scattered manner. A temporary hut was also noticed at a short distance. A number of objects usually A [342] [385] [411] [531] used by the Andamanese tribes for household purposes was found including a sling for carrying babies. A beautiful specimen of a Jarawa Bow painted in red in geometrical designs was also found. Photographs were taken of the settlements of the Jarawa camp and objects collected for the Museum. In another place at *Yeratiajig* remnants of a Jarawa camp including pottery and bones of animals, etc., were found. The party returned to Long Island on 14-3-48 and examined 8 of the remaining members of Loka's party. It left the same day for Port Blair where it arrived at 10 P.M. On the 25th Mr Sarkar and his party with the Deputy Chief Commissioner Mr Gupta, left for Kar Nicobar where it arrived on the following day. It returned to Port Blair after staying for a few days. During this time in Kar Nicobar, besides studying the Nicobarese of the Island Mr Sarkar met two Jarawa children who were captured and brought over there and placed in a local Mission School for education.

In the following year in January 1949, another small party was sent under Dr A. K. Mitra with Messrs H. K. Bose and A. Bhattacharyya, to continue A [361] [342] [350] [354] [162] [125] the survey of the Little Andaman further along the eastern coast. They visited *Hut Bay* on the 28th and went to the Onge settlement there. A large circular hut similar to that seen by us at Tambebui was observed. It contained nine cots with a fire place in the centre. There were also two outrigger canoes, one in front of the hut and another on the beach. Altogether 11 Onges were found consisting of 2 adult males, 6 females and 3 young children between the ages of 6 to 15. The 8 adults and the adolescent boys were carefully measured and observations noted about their special somatic characters. After leaving Hut Bay they went as far as the South Point which is the southernmost point on the eastern coast of the Little Andaman, but did not see any other Onge settlement. They had to return on the 31st as the launch could not be spared any further.

A [142] [164] A [142] The Onges were found to be strong and healthy and free from venereal disease, a scourge, which along with tuberculosis were chiefly responsible for the rapid depopulation of the Andamanese tribes. Our observations agree with the accounts of the Negritos of the Andaman Islands published before

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[P. 6(A)]

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PLATE V.

Figs. 1 & 2—Onge male, front and profile views.

4: Guha E-5 (1948-1949)1953 AZ2 Andamans AZ2
[P.6(B)]

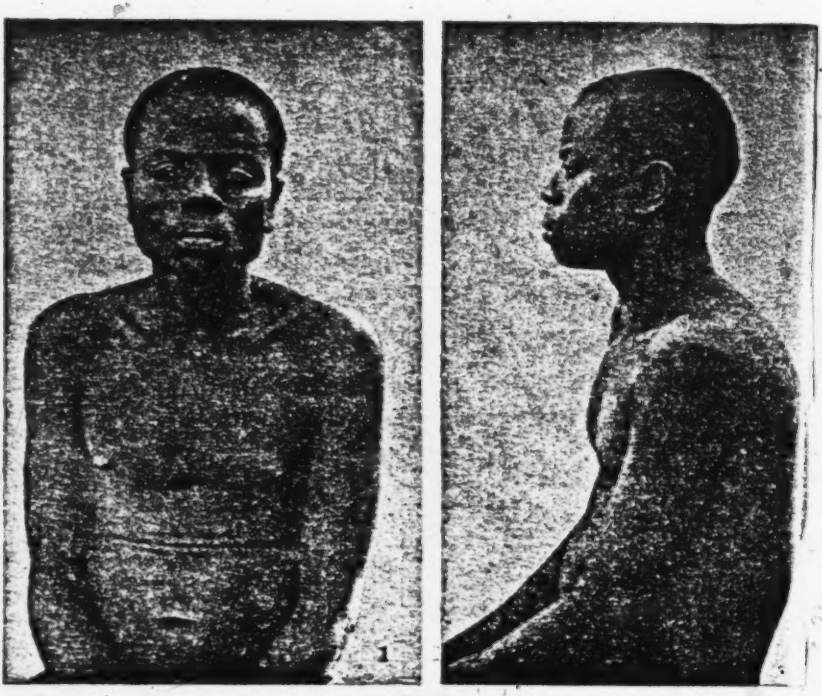

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PLATE VI

Figs. 1 & 2—Onge male, front and profile views.

4: Guha E-5 (1948-1949)1953 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

[P. 6 (C)]

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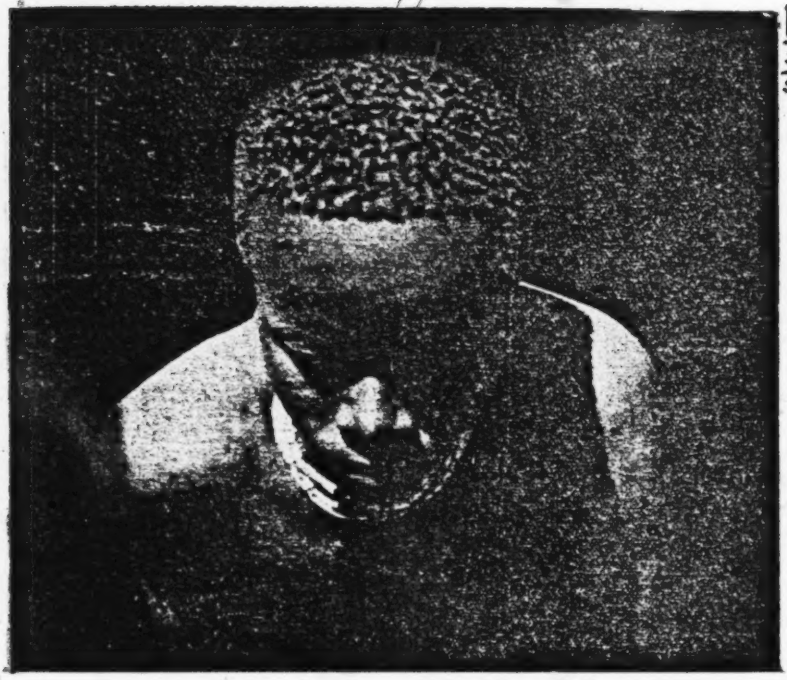

PLATE VII

Onge male showing pepper-corn type of hair.

4: Guha E-5 (1948-1949)1953 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

namely, that they are a very dark pigmy tribe, with short round head and infantile features. The hair of the head is wholly of the distinctly "peppercorn" pattern, *i.e.*, it grows in small tufts with intervening vacant spaces between (*see* Plate VII). The women were noticed to possess steotopygia in a markedly developed form (*see* Plate II, Fig. 2).

Freiherr von Eickstedt who visited the Islands in December 1926, claimed that he was the first scientist to observe these two traits among the Andamanese. His contentions, however, cannot stand scrutiny, for in a paper read before the Royal Society of Edinburgh on February 2, 1880, entitled "Remarks on the Aborigines of the Andaman Islands" and published in the Proceedings of that Society, Surgeon E. S. Brander, who was stationed at Port Blair as Second Medical Officer, speaking about the general features of the Andamanese women, remarked that they "undergo exceptional enlargement of the gluteal region, the appearance of which is enhanced by their custom of attaching branches of twigs to their waist bands, so as to hang over this region. This large development of abdomen, hip and buttocks, added to a very waddling style of gait, gives these women in progression a most grotesque appearance". Eight years after, in a paper published in the Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography, Maurice Portman, who was the Officer-in-Charge of the Andamanese, in describing his visit to the Little Andaman, wrote about "the Hottentot Venus order of beauty" of the Onge women. The Hottentot Venus, as is well-known, is noted for her steotopygic development. These two papers appeared over 40 years before von Eickstedt's publication.

A detailed comparative review of the somatic traits of the Onges based on the measurements taken by members of this Department will be published in the next issue of the Bulletin. Mr S. S. Sarkar's analysis of the blood group data is, however, published in this issue.

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